

## Liquor Distribution - Five Steps to Success

by: Anna Huddleston

If concerned about efficient space management, ask Regency Wines. Their small warehouse is used to perfection - a professional packer couldn't have done a better job. But there is a reason for staking the boxes high and not leaving too much walk room: their wines and liquor sell. In the ten years that the company has been on the Las Vegas market, they have built a portfolio of 550 exclusive wines and receive faxes with orders on average every thirty minutes. The reviews of their products have appeared in *Wine Spectator*, *Wine Advocate* and other national publications. So what lies behind their success?

### Selection of Product

There is a certain art to having a right selection.



**Bruno Laclotte, the founder and the director of the company, is convinced that it is not the size of the portfolio but its quality that matters.** "At this point, our portfolio is as large as we would like it to be," says Bruno. "It is important for us to bring only exclusive and unique products." A son of a winemaker and a winemaker himself, Bruno personally travels to the wineries in Argentina, Australia, France and other corners of the world and tests the wine before committing to a deal. Coming from France, Bruno has close relationship with some of the most exclusive wineries and makes sure that the 'back door' to their collections is always open. The uniqueness of the products is also a great moneymaker for his customers. "If a restaurant serves generic wine, everybody knows what it costs in a supermarket. With a small production label, there can be up to a 100% markup that is direct profit."

### Service

When Bruno was working for one of the major distributors, he was appalled by the red tape and the difficulties a customer had to go through to get the desired product. When establishing his own business, he wrote his commitment to providing the best service possible in the mission statement. "You have to go all the way," he says. "When Como Steakhouse at Lake Las Vegas called at 4PM to say that they have forgotten to order wine for the party that night, we sent the truck within minutes." Yet service starts with personal relationships with the winemakers and with agents at the departure addresses who check the shipments and keep them on schedule. "I call my dad in Burgundy and he sees the cases to the airplane," says Bruno. It is particularly vital with high-end wines to receive them from the original cellar and not from a past customer across the world, which failed to send a check because of potential temperature and storage abuse.

### Branding

One of the hallmarks of Regency Wines is building wine brands from scratch. "We are not looking for big name products," says Bruno, "we look for exclusive products and then make the names for them." When launching a new product, they don't just work on making a deal with a bar or a restaurant but help the establishment sell it. "We bring customers to try our new vodka. We don't want it to stand collecting dust. For example, 'Emerald Girls' are helping to promote our new vodka with fliers and, of course, their good looks."

### Staff Training

Knowledge of wines and liquor is often not a strong point of waiters, yet they are the ones in direct contact with customers and with the most power to make the sale. Regency Wines provides the restaurant with what they call a 'checkbook' - essentially a cheat sheet with the ingredients and the vital info of their products. It helps the waiter understand the wines better and in case he or she is unsure about which wine to recommend, inspires them to suggest Regency's product. The second essential part of staff training concerns the chefs. When introducing the portfolio, Bruno works with each chef to help him create the best matches with his dishes. As the public

*Continued on page 16*

## SPOTLIGHT

*Continued from page 12*

develops a more sophisticated palate, the right wine and meal matches become increasingly important.

### Background Materials

Even though backgrounders and catalogues can be considered part of branding, their role is essential in promoting the product. A chef or a journalist may go as far as tasting, but it is likely that he or she will require more information to help him make the decision or to refresh his memory. Regency provides such materials for every product they represent; a slick pamphlet for Tequila Aha Yeto features a color photo, the varieties, emphasized 100% agave content, provides brief history and distinguishing characteristics of the varieties. It is very visual and also easy to keep on file. Some descriptions highlight a special feature of the product, for example, the label on Lombard's Smoking Ember Whisky suggests that it is best consumed at sunset. Going that extra mile in every operation of the business guarantees Regency Wines a spotlight in the finest restaurants and publications.